DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 215 849 RC 013 355

AUTHOR Reck, Una Mae Lange
TITLE Self-Concept, School, and Social Setting: An In-Depth View of Rural Appalachian and Urban Non-Appalachian Sixth Graders.
PUB DATE 19 Mar 82
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, March 19-23, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Administrator Attitudes; Anxiety; *Cultural Context; *Educational Environment; Elementary Education; *Grade 6; Occupational Aspiration; *Rural Urban Differences; *Self Concept; Self Concept Measures; Sex Differences; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Appalachia; *North Carolina; Piers Harris Childrens Self Concept Scale

ABSTRACT

A follow-up study built on a 1980 study which compared the self-concept of 86 rural Appalachian sixth graders with 80 urban non-Appalacian sixth graders using the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale; then the rural Appalachian sample scored significantly lower in general self-concept and on four self-concept clusters. Where the original research compared the general self-concept score and scores on six self-concept clusters, the follow-up study six weeks later developed a more in-depth view of self-concepts of the same sample of sixth graders by using content analysis of open-ended statements derived from each cluster of the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The significant results indicated that urban children looked forward to a future in the professions or in sports, exhibited greater concern with defining the self in terms of activities and hobbies, and were more concerned about extra-school activities and about an athletic definition of self. Rural children looked forward to a future in skilled labor occupations, defined the self more in terms of possessions and relationships, and expressed more school-related anxiety. Educators in Appalachia frequently fail to learn that such differences are not necessarily deficiencies and should be viewed in their cultural context. (BRR)

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Self-Concept, School, and Social Setting: An In-Depth View of Rural Appalachian and Urban Non-Appalachian Sixth-Graders

Dr. Una Mae Lange Reck
Appalachian State University
Assistant Professor
Department of Elementary Education

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City, March 19-23, 1982.

RC 013355

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Abstract

Educators need to be sensitive not only to their students' evaluation of their self-concepts but also to the content of these self-concepts and the social milieu from which they arise. Building on an earlier study comparing the evaluation of self-concept of rural Appalachian sixth graders with urban non-Appalachian sixth graders, this article discusses research on the content of self-concept from the same research populations. This original research (Reck, 1980) compared the general self-concept score and the scores on six self-concept clusters of 86 rural, Appalachian sixth graders and 80 urban, non-Appalachian sixth graders using The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The rural children, Appalachian sample scored significantly lower in general self-concept and on four self-concept clusters. The present follow-up study presents a more in-depth view of the self-concepts of the same sample of sixth graders by the use of content analysis of open-ended statements derived from each cluster of The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The significant results indicate that urban children look forward to a future in the professions, or in sports; exhibit a greater concern with defining the self in terms of activities and hobbies; are more concerned about extra-school activities; and are more concerned about an athletic definition of self. However, rural children look forward to a future in skilled labor occupations; define the self more in terms of possessions and relationships; and express more school-related anxiety.

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Theoretical Framework:

As stated before in the original research study (Reck, 1980, p. 50),

> Educators need to understand the social milieu out of which their students' self-concepts arise and how these conceptions of the self influence behavior, specifically school behavior. More specifically, educators need to realize that the school constitutes a specific social setting that influences the development of an individual's self-concept, and the self-concept that one carries into the school setting significantly effects how an individual functions in school.

When trying to apply the above to rural Appalachian students and urban non-Appalachian students, it is exceedingly difficult due to the limited research in this area. As mentioned before by Reck (1980), there are isolated research studies which compare ethnic groups within rural areas (Powell & White, 1972); and there are a few previous studies which compare urban and rural samples producing mixed results (Lord, 1971; Trowbridge, 1972; Wendland, 1968; and Yancy, 1973).

For these reasons, the researcher felt compelled to go beyond the original research study which revealed significant differences between rural Appalachian sixth graders and urban non-Appalachian sixth graders in terms of self-concept. In other words, more was needed than an evaluation of self by responses to "yes-no" statements on The Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1969). A method for comparing content differences was needed to supplement the original research for the following reasons: (1) to provide a more in-depth understanding of the social milieu out of which the differences in self-concept between rural Appalachian children and urban

non-Appalachian children arise; (2) to more clearly understand how these differences effect school behavior and attitudes; (3) and, to more accurately see these differences in self-concept as differences and not as deficiencies.

It is the third reason which needs elaboration. Since the major finding of the original research study was that rural Appalachian sixth graders have a significantly lower self-concept than urban non-Appalachian sixth graders (Reck, 1980), the researcher thinks it is extremely important to view this difference as a difference and investigate further the causes of these differences. In other words, it would be an injustice to view Appalachian children in terms of a "deficit model" or inherently inferior since they demonstrated a significantly lower self-concept on The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale.

Too often, educators working in rural Appalachia have made the judgment that the language, behavior, values, and interests of rural Appalachian people are inferior to those of the non-rural middle class from which most of the educators come (Wolfram & Fasold, 1974). They look at rural Appalachian children and primarily see what they do not have rather than what they do have. In other words, there is a tendency to view these children as deficient in certain language, behavioral, and motivational skills when measured against the norms that educators accept. Such a view can only create cleavage between the schools and the people they serve.

What is necessary is an honest acceptance of the human equality of individuals who exhibit cultural and social differences. This requires a sensitivity to the existence of sociocultural differences between educators and rural Appalachian children, and between rural and urban children -- an attitude that these constitute differences rather than deficiencies. Hope-

fully, this sensitivity will eventually contribute to the process of bringing schools and people closer together and help alleviate the negative self-concept in the school setting that rural Appalachian children demonstrated in the original study.

Summary of Original Research Study:

The major finding of the previous research was that rural Appalachian sixth graders possessed a significantly lower general self-concept score than did urban non-Appalachian sixth graders as measured by The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale (Piers & Harris, 1969). In addition, the rural Appalachian children possessed significantly lower scores on the following four self-concept clusters of The Piers-Harris Scale: Behavior, Intelligence and School Status, Physical Appearance and Attributes, and Happiness and Satisfaction. No significant relationship was found between any of the other variables -- total achievement, sex, socioeconomic status -- and self-concept.

Method and Data Source:

The sample consisted of 86 sixth graders from three public schools in a rural county school system in the Appalachian mountains of western North Carolina and 80 sixth graders from two schools in a piedmont North Carolinian city with a population of about 150,000. This sample consisted of the same subjects who were administered The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale in the original research study (Reck, 1980).

This follow-up study was conducted approximately six weeks after the completion of the original research study. Data were collected through the use of twelve incomplete sentences to which each subject was asked to respond in writing (see Table 1). These twelve statements were derived by the researcher from The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale and were presented

Table 1

Open-ended Statements from The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale

Behavior	
	1. It is usually my fault when . . . .
	2. My parents expect . . . .
Intellectual and School Status	
	3. When I grow up I will be . . . .
	4. In school I am . . . .
Physical Appearance and Attributes	
	5. I have a good . . . .
	6. I have pretty . . . .
Anxiety	
	7. I get worried when . . . .
	8. I am nervous when . . . .
Popularity	
	9. My classmates make fun of me when I . . . .
	10. It is hard for me to . . . .
Happiness and Satisfaction	
	11. I am happy when . . . .
	12. I am easy to get along with when . . . .

in an open-ended statement format. For example, the original statement in The Piers-Harris Scale, "When I grow up I will be an important person," was changed to "When I grow up I will be...." The researcher carefully selected two statements from each of the following six self-concept clusters -- (1) Behavior; (2) Intellectual and School Status; (3) Physical Appearance and Attributes; (4) Anxiety; (5) Popularity; and (6) Happiness and Satisfaction -- so as to make sure all the clusters of The Piers-Harris Scale were fully represented in the collected data. Each open-ended statement was read orally by the researcher. In addition, the researcher carefully insured that all subjects had ample time to finish their response and helped any subjects with writing mechanics as needed.

After the collection of the data, a content-analysis of the responses to each statement was performed and response categories were developed. These categories are shown in Tables 2-7 and are explained with examples in the discussion section.

Analysis:

When the two populations were grouped according to area (urban vs rural), sex (female vs male) and achievement (high vs low), the chi-square test of significance was used.

Results:

The following six open-ended statements had significant differences when compared by area (urban vs rural):

(a) Open-ended Statement 3: "When I grow up I will be..." ($X^2=22.24$, df=6, $p<.01$). This statement represented the Intelligence and School Status cluster (see Table 2).

Table 2

Percentages of the Open-ended Statement "When I Grow Up I Will Be..." Classified by Area

Categories	Rural	Urban
Professional	24.3%	47.0%
Learned Skill	31.4	10.3
Sports Figure	12.9	22.1
Creative Skill	8.6	13.2
Referred to Self	10.0	5.9
Uncertain	12.8	1.5

$X^2=22.24$

$df=6$

$p<.01$

(b) Open-ended Statement 4: "In school I am..." (X^2=19.40, df=4, $p < .001$). This statement also represented the Intelligence and School Status cluster (see Table 3).

(c) Open-ended Statement 5: "I have a good..." (X^2=6.99, df=2, $p < .05$). This statement represented the Physical Appearance and Attributes cluster (see Table 4).

(d) Open-ended Statement 6: "I have pretty..." (X^2=8.69, df=2, $p < .05$). This statement also represented the Physical Appearance and Attribute cluster (see Table 5).

(e) Open-ended Statement 8: "I am nervous when..." (X^2=12.57, df=5, $p < .05$). This statement represented the Anxiety cluster (see Table 6).

(f) Open-ended Statement 10: "It is hard for me to..." (X^2=10.44, df=4, $p < .05$). This statement represented the Popularity cluster (see Table 7).

No significant differences were found when comparing sex (male vs female) or achievement (high vs low).

Discussion:

Six of the twelve open-ended statements showed significant differences in responses between the rural and urban groups. The statements which revealed significant differences were the following: (1) When I grow up I will be...; (2) In school I am...; (3) I have a good...; (4) I have pretty...; (5) I am nervous when...; and (6) It is hard for me to.... The first two statements were designed to refer to intelligence and school status, the third and fourth to physical appearance and attributes, the fifth to anxiety, and the last to popularity. None of the statements referring to behavior and

Table 3

Percentages of the Open-ended Statement "In School I Am..." Classified by Area

Categories	Rural	Urban
Positive at Something (external)	13.9%	33.4%
Positive as a Person (internal)	48.6	26.1
Negative at Something (external)	2.8	4.3
Negative as a Person (internal)	19.4	5.8
Average (overall)	15.3	30.4

$X^2=19.40$

df=4

$p < .001$

Table 4

Percentages of the Open-ended Statement "I Have A Good..." Classified by Area

Categories	Rural	Urban
Self	30.6%	50.0%
External of Self	69.4	48.6
Nothing	0.0	1.4

$X^2=6.99$

df=2

$p < .05$

Table 5

Percentages of the Open-ended Statement "I Have Pretty..." Classified by Area

Categories	Rural	Urban
Self	51.5%	75.4%
External of Self	45.6	21.5
Nothing	2.9	3.1

$X^2=8.69$

df=2

$p<.05$

Table 6

Percentages of the Open-ended Statement "I Am Nervous When..." Classified by Area

Categories	Rural	Urban
Self-related	18.8%	10.4%
Extra School and Family	7.2	19.4
School-related	49.4	43.3
Family and Others	10.1	22.4
Diffuse	11.6	3.0
Never	2.9	1.5

$X^2=12.57$

df=5

$p<.05$

Table 7

Percentages of the Open-ended Statement "It Is Hard For Me To..." Classified by Area

Categories	Rural	Urban
Expression of Self	35.3%	25.8%
Sports-related	5.9	25.8
School-related	36.8	29.0
Other	22.0	19.4

$X^2=10.44$

df=4

$p < .05$

happiness/satisfaction showed significant differences. Each of the significant statements will be discussed in turn.

The first statement, "When I grow up I will be...," was designed to get at the subjects' conception of their future. Since one's future aspirations indicate something about one's present concept of self, responses to this statement reveal present concepts of self. The most striking differences between the rural and urban children's responses were in the categories of professional, non-professional, and sports figure. Less than one-fourth (24.3 percent) of the rural children responded that they would be professionals of one sort or another, while almost one-half (47 percent) of the urban children so indicated. Interestingly, in both the rural and urban groups, the referred professional occupations were traditional male or female occupations. Thus, males tended to name such professions as doctor, lawyer, college professor, and scientist, while females tended to refer to such professions as teacher (not college professor) and nurse (not doctor). Thus, both the rural and the urban children tended to be traditional in their selection of male and female professions. However, the rural children were much less likely to point to a future in some professional field.

Instead, rural children tended to refer to a future in non-professional occupations (31.4 percent). The comparable percentage for the urban responses was 10.3 percent. The primary non-professional occupations mentioned by the rural males were farmer, truck driver, and sawmill worker, while the primary non-professional occupations mentioned by urban males were policeman and fireman. The main non-professional occupations mentioned by both the rural and urban females were housewife, secretary, and hairstylist.

A final difference reflected in the responses to this statement is in the area of sport-related activities. Almost one-fourth (22.1 percent) of the urban responses were in this category while only about one-eighth (12.9 percent) of the rural responses were so classified.

Thus, the differences found in the responses to the statement, "When I grow up I will be...," indicate basic differences in occupational orientations of the two groups. Of course, these do not necessarily indicate anything about positive or negative evaluations about conceptions of the self; they may simply indicate different value orientations. However, in the original research (Reck, 1980) the rural children did reply significantly more negatively than the urban children to the statement, "When I grow up I will be an important person," on The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. This may indicate a feeling on the part of the rural children that being a farmer or a housewife, although perhaps respectable in the local community, does not make one an important person as far as the larger society is concerned.

The second statement which revealed a significant difference was the statement, "In school I am...." The most important differential pattern in the responses to this statement involved responses referring to internal states as opposed to those referring to external activities. The rural children referred much more frequently to internal states, either positively or negatively. Precisely 68 percent of the rural responses referred to such things as nice kid, a good friend, unpopular, or bad, while only 31.9 percent of the urban children made references to these negative and positive personal qualities. On the other hand, 37.7 percent of the urban responses referred to external skills or activities such as good in spelling, good in sports, or a poor speller. Less than 17 percent (16.7 percent) of the rural

positive and negative responses referred to specific external activities. In addition, more urban children (30.4 percent) viewed themselves as average in school than did the rural children (15.3 percent).

The third open-ended statement which revealed a significant difference was "I have a good...." The two categories of responses to this statement were "Self" and "External of Self." The former category included responses like mind, personality, brain, memory, name, and imagination. The urban children (50 percent) responded more often in these ways than did the rural children (30.6 percent). The second category included responses such as teacher, book, cat, dog, and mother. The rural children (69.4 percent) responded significantly more often in these ways than did the urban children (48.6 percent). Thus, the rural children responded more frequently in terms of personal possessions or relationships rather than in terms of personal qualities, while the urban responses were more evenly divided.

The fourth open-ended statement that showed a significant difference was "I have pretty...." Once again, the two categories of responses were "Self" and "External of Self." The first category included such responses as hair, eyes, face, teeth, legs, and muscles. Although a slight majority (51.5 percent) of rural responses were in this category, over three-fourths (75.4 percent) of the urban responses referred to the self. The second category included responses such as friends, house, clothes, and room. Almost one-half of the rural responses (45.6 percent) fell in this latter category, while only 21.5 percent of the urban responses referred to things outside the self. As with the previous statement, the rural children tended to respond in less personal and more external ways, emphasizing personal possessions or relationships more than the urban children. In both cases, the urban children appear to possess a greater concern for the self.

The fifth significant open-ended statement was "I am nervous when...." Both the rural and the urban children responded most frequently in terms of school-related anxiety, such as when I have tests or when I am called upon by the teacher. The rural children (49.4 percent) showed a slightly greater tendency than the urban children (43.3 percent) to indicate school-related anxiety. The rural children (18.8 percent) also referred more frequently to self-related anxiety, while the urban children referred more frequently to extra-school (19.4 percent) and family-related anxiety (22.4 percent). Self-related anxiety included such responses as when I think, when I get mad, and when I am worried. Extra-school anxiety included responses such as when I play baseball and when I am swimming. The greater urban reference to extra-school activities as a source of anxiety may be related to the urban child's greater concern with hobbies, activities, and skills as revealed in some of the data discussed previously. The greater family-related anxiety (when my parents get mad) expressed by the urban children may reflect a number of factors, e.g. greater family pressure to succeed or a less happy family situation.

The last significant statement in the series of incomplete sentences was "It is hard for me to...." The rural children responded more frequently than the urban children in terms of self and school-related tasks. Self-related responses were those such as to make friends, to be nice/mean, to smile, to forgive people, and to sit still. School-related responses were responses such as to take tests, to do homework, to answer questions, and to think. Urban children showed a greater tendency to make sport-related statements such as to play basketball, to roller skate, to swim, and to do a headstand. These differences are related to previously discussed differences which showed a greater concern for sports among the urban children and a greater difficulty with school among the rural children.

In summary, the data from the completion of the open-ended sentences reveal certain differences between the rural and urban children. The significant results indicate that urban children look forward to a future in the professions, or in sports; exhibit a greater concern with defining the self in terms of activities and hobbies; are more concerned about extra-school activities; and are more concerned about an athletic definition of self. However, rural children look forward to a future in skilled labor occupations: define the self more in terms of possessions and relationships; and express more school-related anxiety.

Educational Importance:

How are these self-concept content differences related to previous findings that the rural Appalachian children possess a significantly more negative evaluation of self, particularly in the school context? What do these studies suggest to educators? These questions must be answered simultaneously.

First, the content differences discovered in this study arise out of the cultural differences between the two populations. This is consistent with general self-concept theory (Purkey, 1970). The content of self-concept is significantly shaped by the values and traditions of one's cultural environment and this content is brought into the school setting. Secondly, the school setting typically reflects the values and traditions of mainstream culture, a fact which may create considerable problems for children whose self-concepts have developed outside of that mainstream. Most schools tend to center on formal activities, athletics and games, personal skills and traits, and white collar occupations and concerns; all of which were found to be important components of the self-concept of the urban non-Appalachian children but not of the rural Appalachian children.

What happens to rural Appalachian children who confront an important social setting (the school) in which the content of their self content is not of value? The most likely result is what was found in the previous research: the children develop a negative view of themselves in the school setting.

Educators must learn to view children who do not exhibit an orientation of the self toward activities, athletics and games, personal attributes and traits as <u>different</u> but not necessarily <u>deficient</u>. The fact that educators in Appalachia frequently fail to learn this has been noted in informal commentaries on Appalachian education (Branscome, 1974; Miller, 1977), as well as in interview material collected from parents in the area of Appalachia from which the present sample was drawn (Reck and Reck, 1980). If educators are to work toward the enhancement of the self-concepts of the children they teach, they need to understand the relationship between the schools' view of positive and negative traits of self-concept, their students' views of the same thing and the cultural context out of which these views arise, and the negative influence that conflicting images of the positive content of the self can have on childrens' evaluation of the self.

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